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Special Feature “Narrating the Narratives of Saints”

Editor’s Note

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JRSS (The Joint Research on Sufism and Saint Veneration) based on SIAS (Center for Islamic Studies, Sophia University, Japan) and KIAS (Center for Islamic Area Studies, Kyoto University, Japan) and GSRL (Groupe Sociétés, Religions, Laïcités), CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, France) have collaborated with each other for more than ten years. Together we have developed research on Sufism, saint veneration and tariqas.

The following are some examples of the outcome of our collaboration.

Panel Discussions:

“Sufis and Saints among the People in Muslim Societies” in The International Symposium, “The Dynamism of Muslim Societies: Toward New Horizons in Islamic Area Studies” (5–8, October, 2001, Kisarazu, Japan); “The Logic of Succession around Sufis and Saints” in the 2nd World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies (WOCMES-2), Amman, Jordan, June 11–16, 2006; The International Workshop “Rethinking Tariqa” (12 July, 2009, Kyoto); “Sufis and Saints Facing the Government and the Public” in the 3rd World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies (WOCMES-3), Barcelona, Spain, July 19–24, 2010; “Emerging Approaches to the Phenomena around Sufism and Saint Veneration” in IAS Third International Conference 2010 “New Horizons in Islamic Area Studies: Continuity, Contestations and the Future” (17–19 December, 2010, Kyoto).

Special Features for the Magazines:

Masayuki AKAHORI (ed.), Special Issue: ‘Towards New Perspectives on Studies of Sufis, Saints and Sayyid/Sharifs,’ *The Journal of Sophia Asian Studies* 22 (2004); Yasushi TONAGA (ed.), Special Issue: ‘Sufism and Tariqa Movements in the Era of Islamic Resurgence,’ *Annals of the Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 21-2 (2006); Yasushi TONAGA (ed.), Special Issue: ‘Birth and Succession of Holiness among Sufis and Saints,’ *Orient* 42 (2007); Yasushi TONAGA (ed.), Special Issue: ‘The Tariqa’s Cohesional Power and the Shaykhhood Succession Question,’ *Asian and African Area Studies* 7-1 (2007); Yasushi TONAGA (ed.), Special Issue: ‘Rethinking Tariqa: What Makes Something Tariqa?’ *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies*, vol. 2-1 (2008) and Kei TAKAHASHI (ed.), Special Issue: ‘Sufis and Saints Facing the Government and the Public,’ *Orient* 46 (2011).

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Based on these cooperative activities over a decade, JRSS-SIAS/KIAS and GSRL-CNRS have agreed to hold annual joint seminars from 2012 onward. We had the first seminar on November 3rd, 2012 at Kyoto University.

This special feature is based on this first seminar entitled “Narrating the Narratives of Sufis.” To edit this special feature, I changed the title to “Narrating the Narratives of Saints” because all the papers deal with saints rather than Sufis.

In this feature we would like to investigate how to narrate or describe what saints, Sufis, or shaykhs narrate(d) or describe(d). Both how we narrate and how they narrate(d) are to be examined in the following papers. In this feature we concentrated on the modern period, especially the 20th Century, although ZARCONI’s paper also includes the pre-history since the 14th Century.

This special feature is composed of four articles.

The first is Tsuyoshi SAITO’s “Narrating the Life of a Man Known as a Šūfī: An Anthropological Reflection on Narratives on al-Ḥājj ‘Alī al-Darqāwī by His Son al-Mukhtār al-Sūsī and Others.” First, he traces the immanent problems of writing ethnographies in anthropology and reviews the works of and on experimental ethnography. In this article, he focuses on the problem of authority. Taking the case of the biography of al-Ḥājj ‘Alī al-Darqāwī’s by his son al-Mukhtār al-Sūsī in Morocco as an example, the author asks to whom the problem of authority makes sense. He concludes that because the writer of the biography himself had a tendency towards salafī way rather than Sufism, and yet he described his father from the Sufi perspective, this ambiguity enriches the narratives.

The second paper is Masahiko TOGAWA’s “Sharing the Narratives: An Anthropologist among the Local People at the Mausoleum of Fakir Lalon Shah in Bangladesh.” Based on his own experience, he asks what the relationship between fieldworkers and local society should be in a postcolonial context. During his fieldwork, the author by chance became one of the main participants of the opposition movement against the construction of tourist facilities at the mausoleum of Fakir Lalon Shah in the town of Kushtia, Bangladesh. He points out the close relationship between the dilemmas of representation experienced by local people and their representation by fieldworkers.

The third paper is Pierre-Jean Luizard’s “*Héros de l’Islam*, A Secularized Hagiography of a Muslim Saint or How Political Commitment Leads to Sainthood for an Iraqi Shia Religious Leader.” He has already published the translation of *Batal al-Islam* written by Shaykh Muḥammad al-Khālīsī, one of the highest ranking Shia leaders of Iraqi origin, under the title of *La vie de l’ayatollah Mahdī al-Khālīsī par son fils (Batal al-islām)*. Based on this precious translation, he traces the description of this person and depicts the transition of his

image from that of a political leader to a saint.

The last article is Thierry Zarcone’s “Western Visual Representations of Dervishes from the 14th Century to Early 20th.” Since Western representations were severely attacked in Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, they have been looked upon only with bias. The author attempts to re-evaluate them through their use of visual materials. He introduces the brief but remarkable history of Western visual representations. Although some of them are nothing other than so-called *Orientalistic* representations, we can find many others which have an ethnographic value because they give us rich information which Eastern description and visual materials do not provide. He draws our attention to the importance of such kinds of material as a complementary tool for research.